DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 389 018 CS 509 076

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TITLE Textual Analysis in Mass Communication Studies: Theory and Methodology.
PUB DATE Aug 95
NOTE 32p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (78th, Washington, DC, August 9-12, 1995).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Content Analysis; Higher Education; *Mass Media; *Media Research; *Qualitative Research; *Research Methodology
IDENTIFIERS Cultural Studies; Research Suggestions; *Textual Analysis

ABSTRACT

This study examines textual analysis methodology as applied to mass communication studies. It focuses particularly on the theoretical basis of textual analysis, the analytical process, and congruent theoretical perspectives. Although the term "textual analysis" is often used generically, this study differentiates textual analysis as developed by the British cultural studies tradition from other textual approaches, such as qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis. Particular attention is given to making the specialized vocabulary of textual analysis more accessible and providing concrete examples of the analytic process. The need for qualitative studies to delineate an integrated research design and specific methodology to obtain methodological rigor is stressed. Contains 50 references and 17 additional sources. (Author/TB)

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# Textual Analysis in Mass Communication Studies: Theory and Methodology

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Paper presented to the Qualitative Studies Division
AEJMC National Convention
Washington, DC
August 1995

CS509076



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**Abstract**

This study examines textual analysis methodology as applied to mass communication studies: the theoretical basis, the analytic process, and congruent theoretical perspectives. Although the term *textual analysis* is often used generically, this study differentiates textual analysis as developed by the British cultural studies tradition from other textual approaches, such as qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis. Particular attention is given to making the specialized vocabulary of textual analysis more accessible and providing concrete examples of the analytic process. The need for qualitative studies to delineate an integrated research design and specific methodology to obtain methodological rigor is stressed. A list of additional readings is included to facilitate further study.

**Introduction**

In a recent article Cooper et al. (1994) found that despite claims that qualitative methods have "re-emerged" over the last two decades, the percentage of qualitative articles in major U.S. mass media journals has been declining since the 1960s. The authors suggest two explanations for this decline: researchers believe major journals publish only quantitative work and they lack training in qualitative methods. Although a few reviewers reject even the most carefully crafted piece simply because it is qualitative, evidence exists that some of the difficulty may stem from a lack of well-defined terms and methods. Of the six articles in U.S. mass media journals that analyzed data and used "qualitative" as a key term in *Communication Abstracts* for 1988 through 1994, just one specified a data analysis method. The others listed only "qualitative analysis," which is as meaningless as saying data were analyzed using "statistical methods" in quantitative research.

A review of qualitative methodology literature in mass communication substantiates the conclusion that this lack of rigor stems at least in part from a lack of training. Most texts touch on theoretical perspectives or data collection methods, but say little about data analysis methods or the need for an integrated research design (e.g., Lindlof, 1991; Pauly, 1991). Many texts that do address analytic methods often confuse the coding process common to qualitative content analyses, constant comparative analyses, and analytic induction with these methods

themselves (e.g., Berg, 1989; see Bogdan & Biklen, 1992 and Strauss & Corbin, 1990 for the distinction).

Denzin and Lincoln's 1994 *Handbook of Qualitative Research* addresses a variety of theoretical perspectives and data collection and analysis methods and emphasizes the need for congruency among these elements to produce an integrated research design (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). But scholars new to qualitative research may find the volume intimidating, in part because it is not specific to mass communication studies and the terminology across disciplines is at times conflicting. If qualitative approaches are to remain a viable form of mass communication scholarship, better explications of particular qualitative methodologies as applied in the field are needed.

This study examines one qualitative approach--textual analysis. Although the term *textual analysis* is often used generically for any study of text, this usage confounds the method of textual analysis with other frequently used qualitative methods of analyzing text (e.g., qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis). This paper differentiates textual analysis as a distinct method, working through its highly specialized vocabulary to make the concepts more accessible, while giving examples from published works to demonstrate how the concepts are applied. Emphasis is placed on the need for an explicated and integrated research design, comprising a compatible theoretical perspective, research question, and text. A list of additional readings is given to facilitate further study.

**Theoretical Underpinnings**

Textual analysis draws from a number of disciplinary fields, and its application varies somewhat among research traditions. In mass communication studies, however, the method has been most fully explicated by Stuart Hall, director of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies from 1968 to 1979 (Lindlof, 1991). Hall drew on The Frankfurt School's reworking of classical Marxism, Althusser's formulation of structural Marxism, Gramsci's notion of hegemony, Barthes' development of structural linguistics, and Foucault's elaboration of neo-Marxism, resulting in four main underlying constructs: language and meaning, ideology, ideology and myth, and historicity (Fiske, 1994; Steeves, 1987).

**Language and Meaning**

Although many semiologists claim meaning resides in the semantic content of the text itself, textual analysis theorists claim meaning resides in the dialectical process between the text and the reader, which takes place in a particular social and historical context (Hill, 1979). This notion of meaning as a social production and language as the medium through which meaning is produced is at the basis of French structuralist thought. But strict structuralism tends to be reductionist, neglecting the aspect of production, whereas for Hall and other textual analysts language is the means by which the role of the media is changed from that of conveyors of reality to that of constructors of meaning. Media actively labor not to reflect

reality but to construct it, a process defined as a "signifying practice," with the media as signifying agents (Hall, 1982).

Because language is polysemic (having more than one meaning), texts are necessarily polysemic. If there is not "a" message to be found, however, how does a text make sense of an event to readers, and how can textual analysis uncover this sense? The answer lies in the dominant reading of a text, which "positions the reader" in relationship to the text. The analyst must determine all layers of meaning in a text, however, identifying not only the preferred positions but also the alternative readings, even if they are contradictory to the dominant form (Johnson, 1986-1987). Texts can be labeled as either open or closed, depending on the range of different readings available (Eco, 1978).

**Ideology**

The analyst, by unfolding the polysemic layers of meaning in a text, is uncovering the ideological force of these meanings (Kress, 1983). Hall most fully developed in his work this "intimate relationship" between language and ideology (Rai, 1984). Ideology exists in and through language, and the ideological system can be discerned through an analysis of the "domain of discourse--where language is deeply penetrated and inscribed by ideology" (Grossberg & Slack, 1985).

Ideology is the power of language to shape perception and knowing such that social agents "accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine

no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained or beneficial" (Lukes, 1975). Ideologies cannot then be defined as false ideas, and people cannot author them.

Ideology also is not hidden or concealed, but openly manifest within society: what is hidden is the foundation of ideology, the source or site of its unconsciousness. But it is precisely this unconscious foundation that makes ideological communication so powerful. Language represents categorization of the world from a point of view; language has not only linguistic meaning but also presupposes and evokes beliefs and underlying values (Banks, 1989; Geis, 1987; Kress, 1983).

Hall breaks with classical Marxism by adopting Althusser's (1971) and Williams' (1974) notion of ideology as limiting but not causal. Employing Gramsci's formulation of hegemony as obtained by social and cultural leadership, Hall claims that hegemony works through ideology: the dominant classes define reality; the defined reality becomes institutionalized; through institutionalization, it becomes the lived reality (Grossberg & Slack, 1985). This development led to Hall's ostracism from the ranks of classical Marxism, but it offers a more satisfying view of the role of the media in conveying dominant ideological thought. Because the media select the news, rank the news, and classify the news within the limits of the dominant ideology, the media produce consensus and construct their own legitimacy

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through the processes employed (i.e., argument, exchange, debate).

> . . . the news works ideologically to support the dominant power structure by creating a consensus that appears grounded in everyday reality. This consensus, produced through language and symbolization, legitimizes the hegemony of the ruling social formation by manufacturing the consent of the governed. (Meyers, 1994)

Although many possible ways of encoding events exist, the media select the dominant preferred codes, the natural explanations, as the most effective means of conveying sense to the readers. For media producers, the professional ideologies are unconscious, subverted as routine practice, news intuition (Hall, 1977). The media, then, do not set out purposefully to subvert a position in favor of the dominant ideology as if they "were some kind of unified mafia" (Galtung, 1989). They instead subconsciously operate only within the limited range of dominant ideology, which permits a narrow diversity of meaning and interpretations but not alternative readings. The media achieve consensus by systematically including those interpretations of events that "make sense" and excluding anything "extremist," "irrational," "meaningless," "utopian," "impractical," etc. (Hall, 1977).

Media thus produce consensus and manufacture consent. Any disagreements are not only illusory, but they also serve the media by lending them an unearned legitimacy.

> . . . there are fundamental agreements which bind the opposing positions into a complex unity: all the presuppositions, the limits to the argument, the terms of reference, etc., which those elements within the

> system must *share* in order to "disagree." It is this underlying "unity" which the media underwrite and reproduce: and it is in this sense that the ideological inflexion of media discourse are best understood. (Hall, 1977)

Through the space within the hegemonic codes for negotiation, for a subordinate reading of the text to be made, media retain an autonomy in the eyes of the public; because they are not linked to any particular class, they retain their public appearance of objectivity, neutrality, and balance (Hall, 1977).

**Ideology and Myth**

The dominant reading is often conveyed through myths. Hall does not explicitly expound on myths in his work, although the lack is more semantic than theoretic. Hall's notion of how ideology is conveyed is similar to Barthes' (1973) explication of myth. Hall (1982) describes Barthes' work as being at the intersection of myth, language, and ideology, remarking that Barthes puts the accent on the masking and connotative powers of myth, the polysemic interpretations that allow ideological power to be realized. Hall, however, could himself be describing the power of myth, not ideology, when he states

> . . . the more one accepts that how people act will depend in part on how the situations in which they act are defined, and the less one can assume either a natural meaning to everything or a universal consensus on what things mean--then, the more important, socially and politically, becomes the process by means of which certain events get recurrently signified in particular ways. . . . The power involved here is an ideological power: the power to signify events in a particular way. (Hall, 1982)

Breen and Corcoran (1982) view the unconscious encoding process as mythologizing in action, and they posit that the

function of ideology in modern society is only fully understood through an examination of myth as the dialectic link between culture and communication. Myths are employed in communication as ideological representatives to make sense of new events by fitting them into old, familiar cultural molds; myths serve to reify culture.

Reification of myths as perceptual systems makes them invisible, providing, in Said's (1981) words, "the mythical lens through which the news media focus." Because myths are read as facts rather than as socially constructed cultural images, myths can become organized into ideologies: "Ideologies are conventions of seeing and knowing, as myths are, based on *a priori* assumptions about the world which operate at the level of latent, as opposed to manifest, content, which cultures therefore usually leave unchallenged" (Breen & Corcoran, 1982).

But, precisely because myths are what they are, they are comforting; to challenge them is to call into question a shared cultural heritage. As John F. Kennedy (in Safire, 1972) said,

> The great enemy of truth is very often not the lie--deliberate, contrived, and dishonest--but the myth, persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic. Too often we hold fast to the cliches of our forbears. We subject all facts to a prefabricated set of interpretations.

**Historicity**

The mingling of ideological and historical roots within myths exerts a strong and traditional force on ways in which succeeding similar discourse elements can be developed. The "deep structure" of every news statement must be conceived

> . . . as the network of elements, premises and assumptions drawn from the long-standing and historically-elaborated discourses which had accreted over the years, into which the whole history of the social formation had sedimented, and which now constitut ɔd a reservoir of themes and premises on which, for example, broadcasters could draw for the work of signifying new and troubling events. (Hall, 1982)

Along with this force of historicity on the text, Johnson (1986-1987) cautions we must also take into account the immediate and historical context of the reader because "texts are encountered promiscuously." Readers are not wiped clean between texts but control their reading through a sense of coherence and continuity. Therefore an analysis of media ideology cannot examine simply the production of the text and the text itself because the meaning produced in the encounter between the text and the subject cannot be gleaned from the text alone: the text cannot be considered separately from its historical conditions of production and consumption, which form an "indissoluble part" (Hardt, 1989; Morley, 1983).

**Textual Analysis Methodology**

Given this theoretical base driving textual analysis methodology, it follows that the text is the means to the study in textual analysis, not the end; of interest is not the text itself but what the text signifies. The text in this sense is not what you physically hold but a process of "potentially infinite *processes of signification*" (Barthes, in Cheney & Tompkins, 1988). Studying text as a process, a means of study, is termed *decentering* the text.

> More generally, the aim is to decentre "the text" as an object of study. "The text" is no longer studied for its own sake, nor even for the social effects it may be thought to produce, but rather for the subjective or cultural forms which it realises and makes available. (Johnson, 1986-1987)

This primary process of decentering the text distinguishes textual analysis from qualitative content analysis, in which the text remains at the center of the analysis. In qualitative content analysis, content is broken down through open coding into categories, which are then reassembled in relationship to one another through the process of axial coding. Selective coding establishes a core category relative to the others, providing emic and etic understandings of participants' perspectives. Although context remains central to analysis, as in any qualitative method, meaning is found in the text itself and not in the processes of its production and consumption.

For example, to understand Reagan's perspective on the Soviet Union, a content analysis of his "evil empire" speech (1984) might note that he used the term at the climax of the speech, following a tirade against atheist states and the need for nuclear proliferation, and categorize the inherent themes. But a textual analysis of the same speech would not be concerned with determining Reagan's perspective but in identifying the preferred reading of the text as found within the conditions of its production and consumption. Thus while Star Wars defense plans, the greater cultural milieu of the Star Wars films (i.e., The Empire Strikes Back), and the larger ideological power struggle and resulting vocabulary of the Cold War and atomic age

would be important for both methods, for content analysis they provide the context for the subject's perspective, while in textual analysis they provide the ideological and mythic structure used to create a dominant reading. This differentiation in the primacy of the text between qualitative content analysis and textual analysis distinguishes the two methods, making the generic use of textual analysis to refer to all qualitative textual approaches misleading.

Employing textual analysis, then, the analyst must decenter the text to deconstruct it, working back through the narrative's mediations of form, appearance, rhetoric, and style to uncover the underlying social and historical processes, the metalanguage that guided its production (Hall, 1975).

> Our working hypothesis was that every significant stylistic, visual, linguistic, presentational, rhetorical feature was a sort of silent witness . . . every shift in tone and rhetoric, every change in the balance of content, every move in the implied "logic" in the newspaper signified something more than a mere stylistic shift.

The purpose of these initial steps is to uncover the existing framework within which production of meaning takes place. The analyst works to uncover the pre-existing stock of meanings employed by media producers to take the complex process of historical and social change and make it intelligible to readers (Hall, 1975, 1982).

In this first deconstructive phase, then, the analyst identifies the categories used by the media to define the event (e.g., hard news, editorial, etc.). Readers, in turn, have



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expectations of these categories: news on the front page of a paper is important; news on the entertainment page is trivial. These categories serve as "those taken-for-granted, 'seen but unnoticed' background features and expectancies by means of which people share a collective world of cultural meanings" (Hall, 1975). Media also employ codes to give news meaning--visual, verbal, rhetorical, presentational--and tone, how media set the feel of the event to make it meaningful. But these categories, codes, topics, and tones are employed unconsciously by media personnel during the production process. To grasp the cultural significance of media accounts, researchers must interpret the codes and determine their underlying social meanings (Hall, 1975).

The analyst also examines the narrative structure of each story to determine how it contributes to the interpretation of the content. Does the lead frame the issue within a particular context? For example, a narrative beginning "Once upon a time" implies a happy ending. The remainder of the story is analyzed to determine the chronological ordering of events, the causal relations implied by the ordering, and the elements used in opposition to each other, which highlight differences and distinctions between the two.

The beginning of Meyers (1994) analysis of news coverage of the murder of a battered wife by her estranged husband, the director of the Cyclorama exhibit in Atlanta, demonstrates this first step in the deconstruction process of textual analysis

methodology. She notes that the story broke on the front page of the Metro Section, indicating the news staff deemed the story newsworthy. The headline, however, made no mention of murder: "Cyclorama chief tries to end life of battles." Use of this headline focuses attention on the murderer, not the victim; it is the perpetrator of the crime who is given prominence in this case.

The story begins with narration of the husband's fight to gain the directorship of the Cyclorama--a discussion of his struggle to obtain his life-long dream. Not until the fourth paragraph is his murder of his wife mentioned. Although his wife is the victim, she is marginalized in the coverage. The headline on the jump--"Walters: shoots wife, then himself"--keeps the emphasis on him. The murdered wife is the object, not the subject of the story, and the headline serves to equalize the treatment they have received. In this manner, the husband also becomes a victim, and his act of murder is portrayed as obsession gone awry.

This example also demonstrates how the language used is examined to ascertain inherent cultural assumptions. Each word and image not strictly neutral in its connotative meaning is analyzed in terms of its possible interpretations. The larger meaning of metaphors is examined: e.g., a sports metaphor indicates a bipolar competition with a winner/loser, etc. For example, Lule (1991), in an examination of news coverage of the Sputnik launch, found reports immediately employed the metaphor

of a race and attributed it to the Soviet Union: "Symbols and metaphors then were isolated; patterns of portrayals in the report were made clear. For example, the metaphor of the race served an integral role in early reports, with explicit references to victory and defeat." Additionally, to the victor went "a great propaganda victory." In sum, examination of the language used in the news reports revealed that it "enacted a drama of defeat based in language of the Cold War. . . . In the language of the news, humanity's first step into space was a major U.S. defeat in a space race (Lule, 1991).

The analyst must also identify metonyms (the whole hidden by the part used to represent the whole) and synecdoche (the specific hidden by the whole) in the narrative and explore the relationships they represent. For example, when discussing the possibility of nuclear waste leaking at the Hanford plant site, *Time* magazine (August 13, 1990) noted: "The U.S. eventually expects to pump the liquid out of the tanks, encapsulate it in glass and store it permanently in underground sites . . ." The use of U.S. as a synecdoche in this instance removes actual people from the danger of handling nuclear waste. It also removes the general reader both from a sense of involvement and responsibility. In this way the media stress the role of institutions, not people, in resolving social issues (Allen & Weber, 1983).

In like manner, the analyst must isolate symbols and metaphors and explore assumptions and beliefs to determine the

underlying ideology. Lule, in a study of news coverage of Huey Newton's death, presents an excellent brief overview of the deconstructive process of textual analysis through this stage.

> . . . the analysis first examined within each report the selection and portrayal of actors and acts. Of particular significance were the choice of titles, verbs, adverbs, qualifiers. For example, one report stated that Newton was a "self-proclaimed" revolutionary. The phrase cast doubt on his status. Similarly, another report said that Newton at times "portrayed himself to be an intelligent academician."
>
> The study then examined symbols and metaphors. For example, many accounts reported in the lead that Newton was shot in the "same troubled neighborhood where he began his work." Why note the neighborhood? Analysis suggested the reports used the neighborhood as an ironic symbol for the failure of Newton's work.
>
> Assumptions and beliefs that grounded each report then were considered. For example, many reports followed convention and gave over much space to the official record, a recitation of Newton's criminal charges. In the context of the reports, the record was used to foster the belief that Newton's life was spent largely on violence and crime. (Lule, 1993)

Having taken apart the text to determine underlying assumptions and themes in this manner, the analyst must then reconstruct the text to determine the dominant or preferred reading; a textual analysis is not complete if it stops after the deconstructive process. The goal of effective communication is to ensure that the dominant meaning is put into language that will "'win the consent' of the audience to the *preferred reading*, and hence be decoded within the hegemonic framework" (Hall, 1977). In Lester's (1994) words: "a close textual analysis . . . focus[es] on discursive strategies within the text that . . . help reveal how ideological dimensions structure reporting of

news and in fact narrow the range of discursive and democratic possibilities."

As part of the reconstructive process it is important that the analyst identify omissions in the text, because what the producer of a text chooses not to tell the consumer also shapes the preferred reading of an event, casting it within a particular ideological framework. Lule's analysis of coverage of Huey Newton's death notes that the newspapers studied made little to no mention of the grieving of his community and their attempts to memorialize him.

> The depth of feeling suggested, the meanings of Huey Newton for people of color in Oakland, was touched upon but then dropped. Yet, for a few paragraphs, a hint of a different strategy had been raised. Deadline pressures do not explain the omissions of these scenes by other newspapers. Newton was shot in the early morning of August 22. Stories would not run until the following day. Reporters were filing their accounts as the devotions were taking place. Nor can it be said the memorial--dramatic and spontaneous--lacked news value. Rather, the conclusion of this study will suggest that homage and devotion simply did not fit with larger news strategies that degraded and demeaned Newton and his work while upholding the order to be challenged. (Lule, 1993)

Through this process of reconstruction, then, the analyst explores the consequences of the preferred reading and determines the range of legitimate cultural understandings that emerges to identify the cultural myths that underlie their construction. Through identification of these myths, a cultural consensus can be delineated and its implications for media production explored (Lule, 1991). Meyers (1994), in her study of coverage of the murder of the battered wife, concludes, "By perpetuating the idea

that violence against women is a problem of individual pathology, the news disguises the social roots of battering while reinforcing stereotypes and myths which blame women."

An extended example demonstrates how the reconstructive process of analysis reaches this stage. Lester (1992) performed a textual analysis of Banana Republic mail order catalogues, concluding from the initial deconstructive stage of analysis that they reveal an Us-Other dichotomy in which the Other is an exotic object used to commodify Others and sell not only clothing but a way of life. Having examined the cultural implications of the textual and pictorial language and symbols used, she concludes that the copy

> apparently amusing and trivial, positions the reader as one who can share the joke; the joke turns on an ironic position towards colonialism and liberation struggles, thus necessarily denying the real problematics of domination and subordination. Furthermore, through references to the history of the "Botswana Lawn Bowling League" and the "Ivory Coast Tennis Club," a pernicious past is evoked as merely amusing. (Lester, 1992)

Proceeding to the reconstructive process, the ideology of colonialism is then linked to its mythic aspects, demonstrating the role of myth in keeping readers comfortable within their culture and the dialectic process between media producer, consumer, and text.

> [The tactics used] refer to and reinforce already constructed concepts of a specific version of historical experience, a version which can only exist for the preferred reader of the text. . . . a romanticized past when the white man's burden was linked economically, politically and socially with colonial imperatives. This reminds the preferred readers of the comfortably familiar version of history (and current events) in which it is the arrival of the

> "we" who initiated history, who literally invested in the empty canvass of Africa, Asia and the Americas with peoples, places and things. The intertextuality of the catalog keeps the reader squarely within the commodity culture of late twentieth century America. (Lester, 1992)

Finally, the analyst fits the textual analysis back into its context of production, bringing in the notion of historicity both of the text and of the reader. Lester accomplishes this by demonstrating how the myth of colonialism is expressed in other hegemonic cultural forms experienced by the reader.

> The Banana Republic mail order catalog is one text among many which suggests that western cultural and political-economic hegemony is a natural occurrence, that progress towards the post-industrial can be balanced and informed by the acquisition of the authenticity of Others. Therefore, it must be read, not simply as an amusing, if trivial or ephemeral throwaway (although it is that too), but as one among many texts which support the notion that a Third World, distanced by time, space, custom and integrity, is an object available for sale in terms of politics and economics as well as culture. (Lester, 1992)

This passage also points out the polysemic nature of texts and the need for the analyst to acknowledge diverse readings.

In like manner, Lule's study of news coverage of the Sputnik launch places the resulting mythic construction into its social and historical context.

> The study . . . demonstrate[s] how U.S. news reports, while drawing from a rich, timeless, almost mythic treasury of wonder and terror about space, also used humanity's first step into the heavens as a means to enact powerful dramas that evoked and extended ongoing cultural concerns over the Cold War, atomic weapons, perceived shifts of power and prestige, and deteriorating national values. (Lule, 1991)

This fitting together of the analysis with the construct of historicity marks the final step in textual analysis.

These examples of textual analysis highlight the differences between discourse analysis as explicated by its leading practitioner, Van Dijk, and textual analysis as practiced by Hall. It should be noted, however, that within the speech communication discipline, the terms *textual analysis* and *discourse analysis* are often used interchangeably. Discourse analysis, however, has its theoretical roots in the work of Propp, in the Russian Formalism school, and Saussure, at the beginning of the French Structuralist movement, and first flourished in the 1960s (Van Dijk, 1988).

In discourse analysis, the microstructure of the text is broken down into three parts: syntax, the words used; semantics, how the words are put together both intentionally (meaning) and extensionally (reference); and pragmatics, the speech acts. The macrostructure of the text, which defines the theme of the whole, is derived from the microstructure through what Van Dijk terms *macrorules*. These macrorules are reductionist: they reduce information to its universal structure, echoing Levi-Strauss' (1967) formulation of unconscious, universal forms (Van Dijk, 1988). Thus, discourse analysis subscribes to the tenet of meaning in structure: discourse is "the cognitive/intellectual framework within which communication takes place" (Galtung, 1989); rhetoric is the persuasive element found in the structure itself, visible when the detail has been stripped.

This stripping of detail to find the meaning in the structure stands in sharp contrast to textual analysis, which

looks to unfold or unpack meaning from the text by examining the unseen, unconscious ideology behind the production and consumption of the text. While Hall admits the strengths inherent in a structuralist approach--its ability to handle relations and to conceive of the complexity of the whole--he cautions that "structuralism goes too far in erecting the machine of a 'structure,' with its self-generating propensities" (Hall, 1986). For Hall, to reduce text to already present structure is to deny the true meaning of context and the dialectical process.

**Integrating the Textual Analysis Research Design**

Although many methods of analyzing text are open to a variety of theoretical perspectives, the neo-Marxist theoretical roots of textual analysis methodology make it congruent only with critical theoretical perspectives. Researchers operating within a British critical/cultural studies framework have made most use of the method, but feminist scholars have found the method useful as well (see Steeves, 1987 for a full discussion). For example, Meyers (1994) combines a critical/feminist perspective with textual analysis methodology to demonstrate how cultural myths and stereotypes of gender, race, and class contribute to the representation of violence against women.

Although textual analysis methodology is limited to research questions stemming from a critical theoretical perspective, however, other methods of analyzing text can also be employed by critical researchers. What differentiates the method is the research question: participants' perspectives cannot be gained

from textual analysis. For critical researchers interested in obtaining participants' meanings or for qualitative researchers operating out of traditions such as cultural anthropology (e.g., Geertz), symbolic interactionism (e.g., the Chicago School and Lindlof), and American cultural studies (e.g., Carey), content-centered methods are more apt. In particular, the open and axial coding process common to qualitative content analysis, analytic induction, or constant comparative analysis provides a more consonant textual approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Although many expositions of textual analysis concentrate solely on aspects of data analysis, equal care must be given to the text selected. The researcher must choose text that can be profitably decentered to reveal the larger cultural implications of its production. In particular, the text should be rich, or polysemic. The wealth of data contained within such text, however, requires the analyst to restrict the text to a small, and therefore manageable, amount. For example, Lule (1993), exploring the difficult issue of how media handle radical, racial politics, analyzes press coverage of the death of Huey Newton--text which embodies the subject under scrutiny but does so within strictly limited bounds. Meyers (1994), in her study of myths surrounding violence against women, selects as her text the two stories run by one newspaper about the murder of a battered wife. For researchers interested in determining the cultural meaning

inherent in a large amount of text, discourse analysis may provide a better methodological tool.

It should be noted that while the majority of examples used in this paper have been print news accounts, all media texts may be candidates for textual analysis. Along with Lester's analysis of mail order catalogues discussed here, Lewis (1991), for example, has performed a textual analysis of *The Cosby Show*, and Ang (1985) has analyzed how *Dallas* positions its "readers." What constitutes a media text, then, may be broadly interpreted.

Perhaps even more so than in other qualitative approaches, the analyst is part of the textual process. For example, Johnson (1986-1987) notes that this inherent situating of the researcher into the process distinguishes textual analysis from ethnographic approaches, which tend to distance the subject and produce an "Us-Them" construction. Textual analysis is more than just literary criticism, however. While literary criticism enforces critical judgment, textual analysis examines the style and integrates it with the social meaning to uncover the unconscious social framework of reference (Hall, 1975). Textual analysis maintains its rigor by using copious evidence from the text to support the interpretation; a standard Tompkins (1994) refers to as "consistency and public/private texts."

> Words are the facts of texts. The numerical data from experiments on source credibility, fear-arousing appeals and compliance-gaining strategies often do not have the same status of accessibility. We usually take it on faith that the data reported by the quantitative research are facts. (Tompkins, 1994)

Thus Hall (1975) suggests that analysts demonstrate why their interpretation is most plausible by including as much of the original text as possible for critics and reviewers to examine. This requirement, however, can prove difficult given the page limitations of many journals.

**Conclusion**

Many research approaches exist for the qualitative examination of text. Unfortunately, these methods are not always well defined, and the term *textual analysis* is often used generically to refer to all of them. Better definition of research methods is needed, however, if qualitative studies are to remain viable and an integral part of the published body of academic literature. Methodological rigor demands that a research report of a qualitative analysis of text make clear a tightly integrated research design in which the researcher's theoretical perspective, the research question, and the text to be studied form a congruent whole. In the case of textual analysis as a distinct method articulated here, an integrated research design would necessitate a research question stemming from a critical theoretical perspective, a text that exemplifies that issue in a rich yet quantitatively limited way, and a research question that centers not on textual content per se but on the assumptions underlying its production and the dialectic between the producer and consumer. The analysis must both deconstruct and reconstruct the text, ultimately placing the

meaning of production and consumption into the larger social and historical context.

Given length constraints, this paper can only briefly elaborate on the process of textual analysis; reading textual analyses remains a helpful method of learning how to undertake one. Because the term *textual analysis* has been used generically, locating true textual analysis studies can be difficult. The bibliography included here suggests several for further reading.

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